

Senator Phil Rockefeller

WASHINGTON STATE SENATE

23rd LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

SUMMER 2005

During the 2005 legislative session, we tackled a great number of contentious issues. This newsletter will highlight the accomplishments I believe are most important to Kitsap County residents.

We passed a balanced budget that included no new sales, property or B&O tax, and provided responsible tax credits to stimulate business development and revive downtown businesses.

We approved the best school-construction budget in the state's history, and fully funded voter-approved initiatives to lower class sizes and retain excellent teachers.

We set in motion a plan that will assure all children in our state have health care coverage by the year 2010.

We passed a mental health bill that will improve the quality of treatment available for people grappling to overcome mental illnesses and substance abuse problems.

We approved a transportation budget that invests in critical safety projects throughout the state.

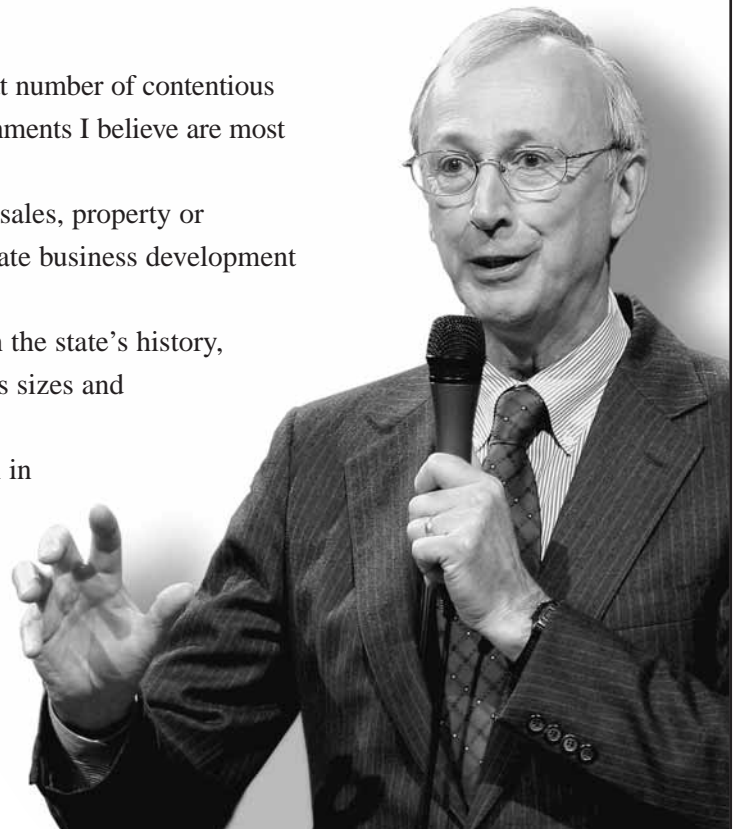
We passed landmark environmental legislation adopting more rigorous auto emission standards and requiring that public buildings meet "green building" standards.

By any measure, we had one of the most productive sessions in recent history and we adjourned on time.

I consider it a privilege to serve you in the Senate, and appreciate your feedback and suggestions.



Phil Rockefeller
State Senator, 23rd Legislative District



How you can reach me

Olympia office:

Modular Building 1, Room 110
PO Box 40423
Olympia, WA 98504-0423

Phone: (360) 786-7644

Fax: (360) 786-1999

E-mail:

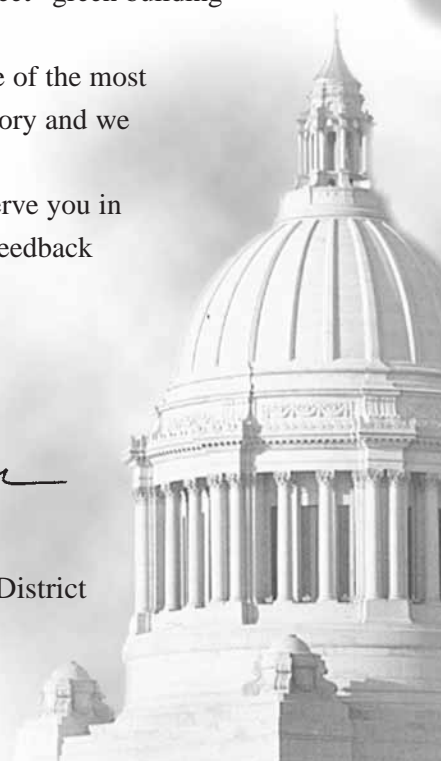
rockefeller.phil@leg.wa.gov

Web site:

<http://www.sdc.wa.gov/rockefeller.htm>

Toll-Free Legislative Hotline:

1-800-562-6000



Washington's 2004 election for governor was the closest governor's race in our state's history; the results were not confirmed until June.

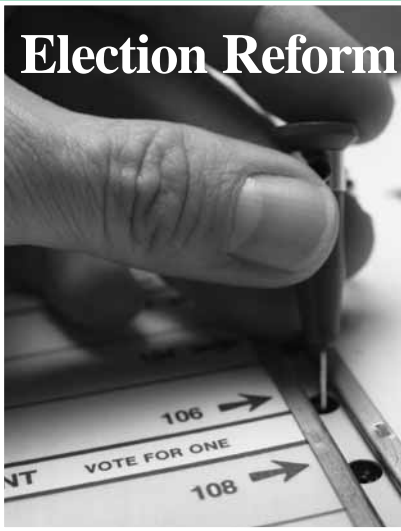
The election highlighted various problems that must be addressed. Washington citizens recognized there were inconsistencies in vote-counting procedures across county lines, confusion among poll workers about provisional ballots, and concern about the voting rights of men and women serving in the military. We worked hard to craft a slate of election reform bills designed to restore voter confidence and participation in our election process. The bills will provide greater consistency of election rules in every county. They will increase ballot security without erecting new barriers that could turn away legitimate voters.

In my opinion, we need to continue work on election reform. Specifically, we need to hold the primary earlier in the year to ensure that all voters, particularly those overseas, are guaranteed to have their votes counted.

The bills include the following provisions:

- All poll-site voters will have to show a photo ID, voter registration card, utility bill or government document to establish their identity. The secretary of state will establish rules governing what documents are acceptable.
- New statewide signature verification standards for absentee ballots will be developed by the secretary of state in consultation with law enforcement.
- Voters whose ballot signatures do not

Election Reform



match the county's records will be sent a new registration form to confirm the signature.

- A voter database, available by January 2006, will provide county auditors with a central list of eligible voters. The list will be consistently updated with the names of deceased persons and convicted felons.
- Provisional and absentee ballots will not be capable of being counted in poll-site tabulating machines.
- Ballots will no longer be "enhanced" when machines cannot read them, but a duplicate ballot would be created so the ballots can be counted. An audit trail will link the duplicated ballot to the original, unchanged ballot.
- At certification, county auditors will have to immediately reconcile all votes cast with the number of voters credited.
- Voting twice or destroying voter registrations will be felony offenses.

Voter registration reform

The revised law requires scrubbing the voter rolls to ensure that felons, the deceased and non-citizens are not voting in our elections. Counties could compare their voter lists against lists of felons, the deceased and federal immigration rolls. The secretary of state will conduct quarterly reviews of voter registrations to ensure that those not entitled to vote are removed from the rolls.

Military voters

I supported, and the legislature passed, a measure to ensure that votes cast by members of our armed forces are counted. This bill requires the secretary of state to send military voters information to alert them that:

- return postage on military ballots is free
- the date written by the voter on the return envelope is considered the date of mailing
- the envelope must be signed by election day
- military voters do not need to pre-register
- faxed ballots are allowed, and
- e-mailed ballots are available.

All-absentee elections

We approved a measure which gives Washington's counties, which administer the state's polling sites and pay the majority of the cost for elections, the option of saving considerable money by conducting all-mail elections.

Healthcare

Mental health parity

Despite the myths that have surrounded mental illness for centuries, these disorders are as treatable as heart disease, cancer or any physical illness. Most mental illnesses improve with treatment, and early intervention yields the best results. This year, we passed landmark legislation that will change the way we approach mental illness in Washington.

This legislation makes mental services as affordable as any physical illness covered by a health plan. The bill requires insurers to provide the same

annual or lifetime dollar limits, the same co-payments, deductibles, coinsurance, out-of-pocket maximums and day/visit limits for mental health services as for other health services. Washington is one of more than 30 states that have mental health parity laws on the books.

Children's health care

This session, the Legislature reversed the policy decisions made in 2002 and 2003 and provided funding that is expected to result in an additional 38,000 children having access to health care services. More specifically, the Legislature:

- Eliminated the premiums that were

going to be imposed last year, which will result in 4,200 more children having coverage.

- Eliminated administrative hassles that were keeping many children from maintaining enrollment (25,000 more children, \$32.7 million state funds).
- Provided sufficient funding (\$9.4 million) to allow about 8,750 immigrant children to receive coverage through a state-only funded Medicaid program.

Mental health funding

I successfully fought to include \$600,000 to continue mental health services for more than 1,500 Kitsap residents.

Transportation

Roads and Bridges

Bridges and roadways around the state are in need of repair, and our rural two-lane highways remain some of our state's most dangerous roads. All of these dangerous and congested roadways will only get worse with the passage of time and the cost to repair them will only increase.

This year, the Legislature approved a transportation package that focuses on public safety, economic development and solving the worst traffic bottlenecks. It funds more than 300 highway, bridge and intersection improvements across the state, including \$162 million for the Hood Canal Bridge. Many of the largest and most important public safety projects will be completed in partnership with local or regional entities. To ensure taxpayer dollars will be spent effectively, the Legislature identified specific projects and built in strict accountability measures, including independent performance audits.

I authored a provision in the Transportation Appropriations bill to ensure that a statewide study on tolls considers using state dollars to pay down the debt on the new Tacoma Narrows Bridge and reduce the need for tolling.

Gas tax

The legislature approved a transportation budget that includes a 9.5 cent increase in the gas tax phased in over the next four years, as well as small annual weight fees on passenger vehicles. However, the gas tax is the subject of a pending voter initiative.

I voted for this budget because residents of Kitsap County would benefit

from over a quarter of a billion dollars in new capital improvements, which could not have been possible using only local revenues. Major projects include the Hood Canal Bridge replacement, a new auto ferry, and ferry terminal improvements. Our county stands to receive substantially more in benefits than it pays in taxes.

We've established stricter accountability provisions to ensure that the projects will be completed on time and within budget. Within one year, the Transportation Performance Audit Board (TPAB), a group of citizens with private sector transportation expertise, will submit to the Legislature a plan to conduct performance audits of each of the projects. Also, the bill provides \$4 million that the State Auditor will use to contract for independent performance audits.

Ferries

Kitsap County depends on our state ferries, and I know that rate increases have created real hardships. I was pleased that my legislation to consider additional factors before adopting new rate schedules was passed into law. It enables the state Department of Transportation and the Transportation Commission to consider both the pre-purchase of multiple fares — whether for a single rider or multiple riders — and frequent ferry users who live in ferry-dependent communities.

Clean cars, cleaner air

A century ago, the number one cause of pollution was industry — factories and smokestacks. But industry did its part to clean up factories. Today, they cause only 11 percent of our state's air pollution. The number one culprit today?



Vehicles, which account for 55 percent of Washington's air pollution.

Unfortunately, vehicle manufacturers have not been held accountable for the damage they're causing to Washington's health, environment, and economy. As a result, state businesses have had to bear a disproportionate burden.

Washington residents also have suffered. Children and seniors are particularly vulnerable to respiratory diseases, which strain our public health systems. In fact, one in 10 children in the Seattle and Spokane areas have asthma.

The Legislature approved a measure to adopt stricter vehicle emissions standards for new passenger vehicles, light-duty and medium-duty trucks, beginning in 2009. I sponsored the Senate version of this legislation.

Washington will join eight other states — California, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maine, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Connecticut — who have already picked the cleaner standards. This represents over 25 percent of the American new car market who will enjoy access to more efficient vehicles and save money at the gas pump.

Performance Audits

We approved legislation that mandates performance audits for every state agency to ensure a responsive and efficient government. It is vital that government spends your tax dollars wisely.

I'm very pleased to have been the author of the final language that was adopted by the Senate, and agreed to by the House. The bill directs the State Auditor to contract for independent

performance audits. Washington citizens will play an oversight role through a Citizen Advisory Board that will establish the criteria and timeline for the audits.

Performance audits will ensure that agencies operate more efficiently, respond to their customers' needs, provide quality services, and comply with laws and regulations. The audits may include recommendations for programs that could be eliminated, gaps

in current services and overlaps of the activities of two agencies.

These performance audits will be in addition to the ongoing reviews conducted by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC), an oversight board convened by the Legislature. I have been reappointed to JLARC by Lieutenant Governor Brad Owen. I had previously served on JLARC when in the House.

Education

Investing in schools

We worked for fair compensation for school employees and increased funding to help every student achieve academic success.

We passed a budget that makes a big investment in our public education system, including community and four-year colleges and universities.

I-732 and I-728

It was a top priority for me to fund both Initiative 728, which calls for lower class size, and Initiative 732, which provides for cost-of-living increases for school employees. This was what the people of Washington asked for via initiative, and it was important to fulfill that promise, which had been suspended for two years.

Alternative Assessments

Beginning with the class of 2008, Washington students will be required to pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) to graduate from high school. This test is an important measure of whether students have attained the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. However, not every student does well on a pencil-and-paper test, and we wanted to recognize that by providing for equally rigorous alternative assessments if a student has failed the WASL twice. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction has money in the budget to develop alternative assessments.



The issue of implementing alternative assessments will be visited by the legislature next year.

The bottom line is that assessments have to be fair. Not everyone will be successful on their first try. But there must be opportunities for fair retakes, and alternative assessments must be a fundamental part of treating every student fairly.

Skills centers

I was, and continue to be, an advocate for skills center funding, including the Bremerton Skill Center. This year, I offered legislation (SB 5717) to provide an ongoing funding mechanism for them. Skills centers offer career and technical programs that open up a variety of career paths to students. The budget includes \$1.2 million in incentive grants for school districts to maintain or increase the number of students participating in skills center instructional programs. These grants will help offset the funding lost to districts when students choose to enroll in skills centers.

Higher education

To compete in an increasingly global workplace, Washington needs to attract the best and brightest — both students and faculty. One of the smartest investments we can make in the future economic health of our state is ensuring every citizen has the opportunity for a high-quality, affordable education.

We worked hard this session to increase accessibility to our state's public colleges and universities. We took a hard look at what the state needs to do to ease the enrollment crunch, to keep up with high-demand fields and to build cutting-edge facilities. It is our goal that no one in Washington is denied an education because of space or geographic location.

Our colleges are bursting at the seams. By 2010, we will need an additional 26,000 enrollment slots just to keep up with current demand in our state. The final 2005-2007 operating budget provides 7,900 additional higher education enrollment slots. We must continue investing in higher education if we want to produce world-class graduates ready to compete in the global economy.

Kitsap residents need better access to higher education. We delivered on the challenge of providing more access to Olympic College and ensured that it will have increased capacity to meet the demands of our region by making major capital investments in new educational facilities and repairing existing buildings.